

Characteristics of the Letter

صفات الحُرُوف

The Characteristics of the letters صفات الحروف

صفات الحروف The Characteristics of Letters

The characteristics of the letters are what differentiate letters from others that share the same articulation point. If the student of the Qur'an is not applying all the characteristics of the particular letter he/she is articulating, it will sound either like a totally different letter, or will sound incorrect at the very least. The correct application of the characteristics of the letters makes the letters clearer, and teaches the various timings of the saakin letters, a very important aspect to good Qur'anic recitation. Studying the characteristics makes clear which letters are strong in make up, and which are weak. From this it is clear that the study of the characteristics of the letters and their application is a very important part of tajweed. Indeed, the application of the characteristics of letters is what differentiates a good reciter from an average one.

تعريفها في اللغة: هي ما قام بالشيء من المعاني Linguistic definition of characteristics: What serves the purpose of describing the meaning. This can be in the way of physical descriptions such as white and black, or can be abstract descriptions such as education.

في الاصطلاح: هي الكيفية العارضة للحرف عند حصوله في المخرج والتي تميزه عن غيره Applied definition: The mode of demonstration of the letter when it occurs at its articulation point, which differentiates it from others (other letters).

Two Divisions of Characteristics

1. الصفات الأصلية **Intrinsic or Basic Characteristics** : These are characteristics that are part of the intrinsic make up of the letter and never leave the letter. This is what will be discussed in this section.
2. الصفات العرضية **Incidental or Conditional Characteristics**: These are characteristics which are present in a letter in some cases, and not present in the letter in other cases. An example of this would be إدغام. These are covered in other areas of this book (included in part one), and not discussed in this chapter.

الصفات الأصلية: Intrinsic or Basic Characteristics

There are eight characteristics in pairs; each characteristic of the pair is opposite to the other characteristic in the pair. There are also seven singular characteristics that have no opposites. Every letter has at least four characteristics, one of each of the pairs of opposites.

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ثمان صفات ذوات الأضداد Eight Characteristics that have Opposites

<u>الصفة The Characteristic</u>		<u>ضدّها Its Opposite</u>
الهمس The Whisper		الجهر The Apparent
الشدة The Strength	التوسط (البينية) The In Between	الرخاوة Softness
الاستعلاء The Elevated		الاستفال The Lowered
الإطباق The Adhesioned		الانفتاح The Opened

سبع صفات لا أضداد لها Seven Characteristics without Opposites

1. الصفير The Whistle
2. اللين The Softness
3. الانحراف The Drifting
4. التكرار The Repetition
5. التفشي The Spreading Around
6. الاستطالة The Lengthening
7. الغنة The Nasalization

¹ Some scholars, and Imam Ibn Al-Jazaree is of them, mentioned two other characteristics with opposites, الإصمات والذلاقة (The forbidden and the fluent). These two characteristics are part of Arabic phonology, but have no application to tajweed of the letters nor effect on the pronunciation of the letters.

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الصفات التي لها أضداد Characteristics that have Opposites

<u>الهمس The Whisper</u>	<u>الجهر The Apparent</u>
<p>في اللغة: الخفاء</p> <p><u>Linguistic Definition: Concealment</u></p>	<p>في اللغة: الإعلان</p> <p><u>Linguistic Definition: Apparent</u></p>
<p>في الاصطلاح: جريان النفس عند النطق بالحرف لضعفه الناشئ عن ضعف الاعتماد عليه في مخرجه.</p> <p>Applied tajweed definition: Running on of breath when pronouncing the letter due to its weakness in its origin, which originated from weakness of relying on the letter at its articulation point of origin.</p>	<p>في الاصطلاح: انحباس جريان النفس عند النطق بالحرف لقوته الناشئة عن قوة الاعتماد عليه في مخرجه.</p> <p>Applied tajweed definition: Imprisonment of the flowing of breath when pronouncing a letter due to its strength which originated from relying on the letter at its articulation point.</p>
<p>حروفها: "فحثة شخص سكت"</p> <p>Its Letters</p>	<p>Its letters: The rest of the Arabic alphabet</p>

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<u>الشدة The Strength</u>	<u>التوسط (البينية) The In-between</u>	<u>الرخاوة The Softness</u>
في اللغة: <u>القوة</u> <u>Linguistic definition:</u> <i>Strength</i>	في اللغة: <u>الاعتدال</u> <u>Linguistic definition:</u> <i>Moderation</i>	في اللغة: <u>اللين</u> <u>Linguistic definition:</u> <i>Softness</i>
<p><u>الشدة في الاصطلاح:</u> انحباس جريان الصوت عند النطق بالحرف لكمال الاعتماد على المخارج.</p> <p><u>Applied tajweed definition:</u> Imprisonment of the running of the sound when pronouncing a letter due to complete reliance on the articulation point.</p>	<p><u>التوسط في الاصطلاح:</u> كون الحرف بين الصفتين أي بين صفة الشدة و صفة الرخاوة بحيث ينحبس بعض الصوت ويجري بعضه عند النطق به.</p> <p><u>Applied tajweed definition:</u> The letter is in between the two characteristics; between strength and softness so that the sound is partially imprisoned and partially running when pronouncing the letter.</p>	<p><u>الرخاوة في الاصطلاح:</u> جريان الصوت مع الحرف لضعف الاعتماد على المخارج.</p> <p><u>Applied tajweed definition:</u> Running on of the sound with the letter due to weakness in reliance on the articulation point.</p>
حروف الشدة: "أَجَدَ قَطٍ بَكَتْ"	حروف التوسط: "لِنَ عُمَرُ"	Its letters: the rest of the Arabic alphabet

الشدة والتوسط والرخاوة Fruits of the Characteristics of

There are 28 letters that can be voweled, alif is not included in the number, since the alif never has a vowel and is always saakinah. The vowels are equal in timing between all letters, no matter whether the letter has the characteristic of شدة (strength), توسط (in between), or رخاوة (softness). No letter is longer than another when they are voweled; all vowels are equal. An example can be drawn in the word "ضَرَبَ"; each letter has a vowel, and in this word it so happens that all the letters have a fathah (فَتْحَة) as a vowel. The first letter in this word is a ضاد, which has the characteristic of رخاوة, or softness, the second letter is a راء, which has the

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characteristic of **توسط** (in between softness and strength), and the third letter is a **باء**, which has the characteristic of **شِدَّة** (strength); yet when this word is recited properly, the timing of the **الباء**, **راء**, **ضاد**, **راء**, and **الباء** are equal. No voweled letter is longer in timing than the other.

When there is a sukoon on the Arabic letters, the case is different. There is a difference in timing of the saakinah letters depending on whether they have the characteristic of **شِدَّة** or **رخاوة**, or **توسط**. The shortest timing for saakinah letters is for the letters of **شِدَّة** (which are: **"أَجِدْ قَطِ بَكَت"**). The saakinah **توسط** letters have a longer timing than those of **شِدَّة**, and the saakinah letters of the **رخاوة** group have a longer timing than that of the **توسط** group of letters (the **لِنْ عُمَر** group).

All saakinah **رخاوة** letters have equal timing to each other. This means that **س** should have the same timing as **ح**, and **ه**, as well as all other letters of this group of **رخاوة**. In the same line of thought, all letters of **توسط** that have a sukoon are equal in timing to each other. The **ل** should have the same timing as **ر**, etc. This law of equality among similes was documented by Al-Imam Al-Jazaree, in his poem مَنْظُومَةُ: الْمُقَدِّمَةُ فِيمَا يَجِبُ عَلَى قَارِئِ الْقُرْآنِ أَنْ يَعْلَمَهُ, when he said:

وَاللَّفْظُ فِي نَظِيرِهِ كَمَثَلِهِ (and the parallel of an utterance is the same as it).

If we look at the first aayah of the Faatihah, we can analyze this further.

﴿ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴾ [الفاتحة: ١]

The first letter of the first word, **بِسْمِ** has a vowel, so it takes the time that all vowels have of one vowel count. The second letter is a **سین** with a sukoon, and we know that the **سین** has the characteristic of **رخاوة**, and we also know that the **رخاوة** group of letters has the longest timing of all the other letters, when saakin. We keep in mind though, that all **رخاوة** letters that are saakinah are equal in length to each other. The third letter, a **میم** has a vowel, so it has the timing that all voweled letters have. The fourth letter that is pronounced is the saakin letter of the shaddah, a **لام ساكنة**, in the word: **اللَّهُ** and of the **توسط** group, so it gets a timing a little shorter than that of the **سین ساكنة** that was in the previous word. The next letter is the second **لام** of the **شِدَّة**, a **laam** with a fathah (**فَتْحَة**), and this gets the timing all voweled letters get.

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After this is an alif, which is always in a lengthened state, and it receives the measure of two vowel counts. After that, there is a هاء with a kasrah, so it receives the timing of one vowel count, equal to all other vowels. The next pronounced letter is the first part of the shaddah on the راء, a راء with a sukoon; this is the first pronounced letter of the word: الرَّحْمَن. The راء is of the تَوَسُّط group of letters, so it receives an in between amount of timing, exactly the same timing of the laam saakinah in the word الله. The following letter is the second part of the shaddah, a راء with a fathah (فَتْحَة), so it receives one vowel count of timing. After this there is a حاء with a sukoon on it. This letter is of the رِخَاوَة group of letters, and as previously discussed they have the longest timing of all saakinah letters. The ميم that follows this has a fathah (فَتْحَة), and therefore receives one vowel count. It is followed by an alif, which receives the equal of two vowel counts. The نون with a كَسْرَة that comes after the alif receives one vowel count. The next pronounced letter is the first part of the راء that has a shaddah on it, a راء ساكنة of the word: الرَّحِيم. It is of the تَوَسُّط group of letters, so it receives an in between amount of timing, and equal to all other letters of this same group. The following letter is the second part of the shaddah, a راء with a fathah, so it receives one vowel count of timing. After this, there is a حاء with a kasrah on it, and it therefore receives one vowel count. A ياء مدية comes next, and as previously studied in the mudood section, it receives two vowel counts if not followed by a hamzah or sukoon. In this case, we will be stopping on the word الرَّحِيم and therefore will be putting a circumstantial sukoon on the ميم. There is then a مَدَّ عَارِضٌ لِلسُّكُون, and the ياء therefore will be lengthened 2, 4, or 6 counts. The last letter, a ميم will be stopped on with a sukoon, and therefore will have an “in between” amount of timing on it; the same of all saakinah letters of the تَوَسُّط group of letters.

In conclusion, all voweled letters are equal in time to one another; all getting one vowel count. Saakinah letters have different lengths of timing depending on which group they belong to. The letters of the رِخَاوَة group have the longest timing, yet they are equal in timing to each other. The تَوَسُّط group of letters have a shorter amount of timing when saakinah, but again, equal to each other. The شِدَّة letters have the shortest timing of all the saakinah letters, and are equal to each other.

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<u>الاستعلاء</u> The Elevated	<u>الاستفال</u> The Lowered
<p>في اللغة: <u>الارتفاع</u> <u>Linguistic definition: Elevation</u></p>	<p>في اللغة: <u>الانخفاض</u> <u>Linguistic definition: Dropping or Lowering</u></p>
<p><u>في الاصطلاح</u>: اتجاه ضغط الحرف إلى الحنك الأعلى نتيجة ارتفاع أقصى اللسان عند النطق بالحرف المستعلي.</p> <p>Applied tajweed definition: Directing pressure of the letter to the roof of the mouth due to an elevation of the deepest part of the tongue when pronouncing an "elevated" letter [letter from this group].</p>	<p><u>في الاصطلاح</u>: عدم انضغاط الحرف إلى الحنك الأعلى لعدم ارتفاع أقصى اللسان عند النطق بالحرف المستفل.</p> <p>Applied tajweed definition: The absence of pressuring the letter to the roof of the mouth due to the lack of raising the deepest part of the tongue when pronouncing a "lowered" letter [letter from this group].</p>
حروفها: "خُصَّ ضَغُطٌ قَطْ"	The rest of the letters in the Arabic alphabet

<u>الإطباق</u> The Adhesion	<u>الافتتاح</u> The Open
<p>في اللغة: <u>الاتصاق</u> <u>Linguistic definition: Adhering</u></p>	<p>في اللغة: <u>الافتراق</u> <u>Linguistic definition: Separation</u></p>
<p><u>في الاصطلاح</u>: انحصار الصوت بالحرف المطبق بين اللسان والحنك الأعلى.</p> <p>Applied tajweed definition: The compression of the sound of the "إطباق" letter between the tongue and roof of the mouth.</p>	<p><u>في الاصطلاح</u>: عدم انحصار الصوت بالحرف المفتوح بين اللسان والحنك الأعلى.</p> <p>Applied tajweed definition: The absence of compression of the sound of the letter of "إفتاح" between the tongue and the roof of the mouth.</p>
حروفها: "صَادُ ضَادُّ طَاءُ ظَاءُ"	The rest of the Arabic alphabet

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Characteristics that have no Opposites الصفات التي لا ضد لها

الصفير The Whistle

تعريفه في اللغة: هو حدة الصوت

Its linguistic definition: Sharpness of sound

في الاصطلاح: حدة في صوت الحرف تنشأ عن مروره في مجرى ضيق.

Its Applied Definition: Sharpness in the sound of the letter produced from it transversing through a tight passage.

Its letters are three: السين - الزاي - الصاد

اللين The Softness

تعريفه في اللغة: السهولة

Its linguistic definition: Easiness

في الاصطلاح: خروج الحرف من مخرجه بسهولة من غير كلفة على اللسان.

Its Applied Definition: Emitting the letter from its articulation point with ease without effort from the tongue.

Its letters: الواو و الياء اللينتان، أي: الواو و الياء الساكتان المفتوحة ما قبلهما

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الانحراف The Drifting

في اللغة : الميل Its linguistic definition: *Drifting*

في الاصطلاح: ميل صوت الحرف لعدم كمال جريانه بسبب اعتراض اللسان طريقه.

Its Applied Definition: Drifting of the sound of the letter due to the incomplete running caused by the tongue turning from its path.

حروفها : اللام و الراء Its letters

الفرق بين انحراف اللام والراء The difference between the “drifting” in the لام and الراء:

يكون انحراف صوت اللام إلى جانبي طرف اللسان لاعتراض الطرف طريق اللام، أما الراء فبالعكس: ينحرف الصوت بها من جانبي طرف اللسان إلى وسطه.

The deviation of the sound of the لام is to the sides of the tip due to the tip blocking the route of the لام . The deviation of the sound of the letter راء is from the sides of the tongue in to the middle of the tongue.

The tip of the tongue closes off the articulation point of the لام , the sound then deviates off towards the sides of the tongue.

The راء sticks at the front of the tip to the articulation point, and the sound needs to escape so that there will not be تكرار (the next characteristic to be discussed). A small space at the very tip of the tongue is made so the sound can escape out of the mouth, excess trilling of الراء is avoided. This is the reason both of these letters have the characteristic of توسط instead of رخاوة.

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التكرار The Repetition

Its language definition: Repetition of something once or more. تعريفه في اللغة: إعادة الشيء مرة أو أكثر.

في الاصطلاح: ارتعاد طرف اللسان عند التطق بالراء ارتعاداً خفيفاً نتيجة ضيق مخرجها، وليحذر القارئ من المبالغة في التكرير المؤدي إلى ظهور أكثر من راء.

Its Applied Definition: The light trilling of the tongue when pronouncing the راء due to its tight articulation point. The reciter should be careful not to exaggerate the repetition leading to the occurrence of more than one of the letter راء.

Its letter حرفه حرف واحد وهو: الراء

التفشي The Spreading around

Its definition : Spreading around تعريفه في اللغة : الانتشار

في الاصطلاح: هو انتشار صوت الشين ابتداءً من مخرجه حتى يضطدم بالصفحة الداخلية للأسنان العليا.

Its Applied Definition: Spreading the sound of the letter “sheen” starting from its articulation point until it collides with the inner plates of the top teeth.

Its letter حرفه حرف واحد وهو: الشين

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الاستطالة The Lengthening

Its linguistic definition : Lengthening تعريفها في اللغة: الامتداد

في الاصطلاح: هي اندفاع اللسان إلى الأمام بعد اصطدامه في المخرج نتيجة لضغط الصوت عليه حتى يلامس رأس اللسان أصول الثنيتين العلويتين.

Its Applied Definition: It is the pushing of the tongue forward after it collides at its articulation point, and this is due to the influence the compression of sound on it (the tongue), until the tip of the tongue lightly touches the gum line of the two top front incisors.
Note: The forward pushing is mechanical; the sound should not travel forward with this involuntary movement. If the sound went forward with it, the sound of الضاد would then end up sounding like a دال, which is incorrect. The lengthened sound of الضاد is that of its characteristic of رخاوة and should be as long as الرخاوة in any other letter that has رخاوة.

Its letter حرفه حرف واحد وهو: الضاد

الغنة The Nasalization

تعريفها في اللغة: صوت أغن يخرج من الخيشوم.

Its linguistic definition: A nasal sound that is emitted from the nose.

This is a required or intrinsic characteristic of the نون and ميم and cannot be separated from these two letters.

A note about the نون and ميم and the reason for them being in the متوسط group.

If we dissect the مخرج and characteristic of the غنة in the نون and ميم into separate entities, we can understand why the two letters are of the متوسط group. Closing off the nostrils can eliminate the characteristic of the غنة. When this is done and we try to say نون or ميم, we notice that there is imprisonment of the running of the sound (شدة). On the other hand, if we emit a غنة without using any مخرج of a letter, it is noticed that there is running of the sound (رخاوة). When we put the two together again, we end up with متوسط.

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The Characteristics as Documented in الجَزَرِيَّة Poem on Tajweed

Al-Imam Al Jazaree in his poem الْمُقَدِّمَةُ فِيمَا يَجِبُ عَلَى قَارِئِ الْقُرْآنِ أَنْ يَعْلَمَهُ, laid out the characteristics and their letters to make their memorization easier.

[بَابُ صِفَاتِ الْحُرُوفِ]

(٢٠)
 صِفَاتُهَا: جَهْرٌ وَرِخْوٌ مُسْتَفِلٌ مُنْفَتِحٌ مُصَمَّتَةٌ، وَالضَّدَّ قُلْ
 مَهْمُوسُهَا: فَحْتُهُ شَخْصٌ سَكَتٌ شَدِيدُهَا لَفْظٌ: أَجْدُ قَطٍ بَكَتْ
 وَبَيْنَ رِخْوٍ وَالشَّدِيدِ: لِنَ عُمَرُ وَسَعٍ عَلَوٍ: خُصَّ ضَعُطٌ قِظٌ حَصَرُ
 وَصَادُ ضَادٌ طَاءٌ ظَاءٌ: مُطَبَقَةٌ وَقَرٌّ مِنْ لُبٍّ: الْحُرُوفُ الْمَذْلُوقَةُ
 صَفِيرُهَا: صَادٌ وَزَايٌ سَيْنٌ قَلْقَلَةٌ: قُطْبٌ جَدٍ، وَاللَّيْنُ
 وَآوٌ وَيَاءٌ سَكَنًا، وَأَنْفَتَحَا قَبْلَهُمَا، وَالْإِنْحِرَافُ: صُحْحَا
 فِي اللَّامِ وَالرَّاءِ، وَبِتَكْرِيرٍ جُعِلَ وَلِلتَّفَشِّي: الشَّيْنُ، ضَادًا: اسْتَطِلَ

The meaning of the lines of poetry is:

Its [the letter's] characteristics are apparent (جهر), softness (رخو or رخاوة) and lowered (إصمات\مصممة), opened (انفتاح\منفتحة), desisted (استفال\استفلال), and the opposite [of them] say: [The following are the opposites of these named characteristics and their letters. [The first group of characteristics has the remaining letters left after the opposite characteristic's letters are taken out.] Its whispered (همس\مهموس) [letters are] "أَجْدُ قَطٍ بَكَتْ" and between soft and strengthened (رخو والشديد) [are the letters] "لِنَ عُمَرُ", and the seven elevated are gathered (استعلاء\علو) [in the phrase of] "خُصَّ ضَعُطٌ قِظٌ". [The letters] طاء، ظاء، ضاد، صاد [have the characteristic of] "قَرٌّ مِنْ لُبٍّ" [and] (اطباق\مطبقة) [have the characteristic of] (ذلاقة\مذلفة). Its whistle (صفير) [has the letters of] سين، زاي، صاد. The قَلْقَلَةُ [has the

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letters] "قُطْبُ جَدٍ" ^٢ [And the letters of] softness (اللين) [are] واو and ياء [that have a] sukoon and a fathah (فَتْحَة) before them, and the drifting (الانحراف) is correct on the لام and راء, and on it [the راء] the repetition (التكرار). And [the characteristic of] spreading (التفشي) is on the شين, and [the letter] ضاد has the characteristic of lengthening (استطالة\استطيل).

Divisions of Characteristics According to Strength and the Weakness

The preceding characteristics are divided into three groups:

الصفات القوية: The Strong Characteristics

الجهر، الشدة، الاستعلاء، الإطباق، الصَّفير، القلقلة، الانحراف، التَّكرير، التَّفشي، الاستطالة، الغنة

الصفات المتوسطة: The Middle Characteristics

التوسط (البينية)

الصفات الضعيفة: The Weak Characteristics

الهمس، الرخاوة، الاستفال، الانفتاح، اللين

From these categories, we can then divide the letters into similar classifications. Letters that are strong (حروف قوية) are those that have all the strong characteristics. An example of this is الطاء. Weak letters (حروف ضعيفة) are those that have all the weak characteristics in it. A sample of a weak letter is الهاء. The intermediary letters (حروف متوسطة) are the letters that have a mixture of strong characteristics and weak characteristics. An example of this is in اللام.

^٢ The "qalqalah" is considered by many to be a presented characteristic and not an intrinsic characteristic, and such is the opinion of his eminence, Sheikh Dr. Ayman Swayd. It is for that reason that the qalqalah was not explained in this section.

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